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Minority Group Performance Under Various Conditions of School Ethnic and Economic Integration

* Presented in this issue of the BULLETIN is the concluding section and bibliography from a position paper prepared by Dr. St. John for ERIC-IRCD which will be available in microfiche and hard copy from EDRS after January 1, 1969. Statements marked with asterisks (*) refer to the position paper.

Nancy H. St. John, Ed.D.

The literature on minority group performance in segregated and integrated schools offers more evidence as to the methodological difficulties of research in this area than it does as to the relation between school ethnic composition and achievement. Our review of one-celled studies of the performance of children in integrated or segregated situations indicated again and again that scores are higher for those living or studying in a more integrated and more enriched environment—off the reservation rather than on, in continental United States rather than on the island of Puerto Rico, in the urban North rather than in the rural South, in northern towns rather than in metropolitan ghettos. But such comparisons between studies are suggestive at best. They can never establish a relationship.

The "before" and "after" studies of the desegregation of school systems or individuals are more convincing. Following desegregation, of whatever type or at whatever academic level, subjects perform no worse, and in most instances better. Those studies which measure the same individuals at Time 1 and Time 2—Lee, Archibald, Clark and Plotkin, Katzenmeyer—have thus largely ruled out the enduring characteristics of the subjects and factors in their past (SES, IQ) as explanation of the change. (75, 9, 23, 69) But interaction between desegregation and quality of schooling has not been ruled out. In fact, we are told that desegregation in Washington, D. C. brought an upgrading of education and in Louisville gave a psychological boost to teachers. Such changes could well explain the gain in achievement both in those cities and in situations involving more classroom desegregation. For instance, schools in Philadelphia and in Boston's suburbs are not equal to the southern schools or central Boston schools from which Lee's and Archibald's subjects came. Nor have these researchers controlled for such other sources of invalidity as contemporaneous events in community and school, (a racial incident, for instance) or maturation, or the effect of the first testing.

The pre-Coleman cross-sectional studies I have reviewed are for the most part so small-scale and statistically limited that we can have little confidence in the generalizability of their findings. The Bureau of Indian Affairs study, while large-scale, did not succeed in isolating the effect of racial isolation from the effect of other variables. (27) Matzen's correlational analysis found no difference uniquely attributable to classroom per cent Negro. (83) The criticisms of the Coleman data and their analysis have already been referred to*—the sampling problems, the poor measure of social class, the failure to separate the effects of neighborhood SES and of school quality, the imprecise and non-longitudinal measure of school ethnic composition. In spite of these limitations, the survey provides fairly convincing evidence as to the existence of a powerful relation between social class integration and achievement. As to a residual relation between ethnic integration and achievement, the evidence is less clear. The effect appears to be small, but could be either exaggerated or masked by inadequate control of school quality and home background characteristics.

In theory, four-celled studies can avoid most of the weaknesses of both panel and cross-sectional research. But no investigation to date has been able to meet all the canons of pure or quasi-experiments. Bell's early study of Japanese Americans suffered from the difficulty of matching segregated and non-segregated children on language proficiency. (14) It is likely that the interaction of selection and maturation obscured real gains. In a sense this study captures the problem of all attempts to equate naturally segregated and non-segregated populations. Isolated groups, even those of English-speaking backgrounds, do not "speak the same language" as white middle-class Americans. Wilson achieves a post-facto "before" measurement by controlling on primary grade mental maturity. (143) This procedure has methodological elegance but may mask the effect of racial segregation. Children from segregated backgrounds who get the same IQ scores as children from integrated backgrounds may be surmounting greater obstacles to do so, and therefore have more ability or more home "achievement press", (even if "equated" on parental occupation). As they mature, the benefit of such background and the handicap of segregation may cancel each other out, if IQ score is held constant.

If bussing studies could randomly assign subjects to experimental and control groups, the matching problem would be avoided; but politics and parental preferences seem invariably to bias the selection. The on-going Hartford experiment, which apparently is achieving more random selection than the other projects reviewed, should therefore be followed with interest. Another aspect of the selection problem

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is what Campbell and Stanley call "mortality", a differential subsequent dropout from experimental or control groups if certain children leave town, leave the program, or are not tested. Few of the bussing studies referred to have measurements on all children originally selected. Furthermore, small or non-representative samples cannot reveal those effects specific to each IQ, personality or SES sub-group.

The small number of children involved in most bussing experiments not only handicaps statistical tests of their effectiveness, but also probably adds to the Hawthorne effect for those involved. The stimulation or embarrassment of being a guinea pig or a newcomer is probably short-run and can be discounted if the experiment is of long enough duration. But the effect of riding a bus to a community other than one's own might be continuing and could only be controlled if students were bussed both to a segregated and to an integrated school.

This raises the question of whether, as most critics of the Coleman report claim, the ideal test of the effect of integration on children is a study in which children are measured "before" they are desegregated. (30, 36, 94, 103) True, this fits the classic model. But I would argue that the most ideal imaginable experiment of this kind would only tell us about the effect of desegregation, a potentially traumatic process. If any evidence beyond our common sense and common values is needed on the consequences of school ethnic composition—and I am not sure that it is—then it is evidence as to which kind of neighborhood a child should be born into and which kind of school should be his from kindergarten on. Comparisons of children who have always been integrated with children who have always been segregated therefore seem more relevant, even though securing a "before" measurement and random assignment to groups becomes a challenge to the ingenuity of researchers.

The laboratory experiments of Katz and the lessons he draws from them are very convincing as to the "threats" and "facilitations" involved in the process of desegregation. (64, 65, 67, 68) Though as yet unsupported by adequate field research, the most plausible hypothesis is that the relation between integration and achievement is a conditional one: the academic performance of minority group children will be higher in good integrated than in good segregated schools, providing they are supported by staff and accepted by peers. As evidence for the first condition I refer to the report from Hartford that only the bussed students who received staff support in their new schools showed gains over non-bussed students. (80, 81) As evidence for the second condition, we have the findings of *Racial Isolation in the Schools* on the importance of interracial friendship to achievement in an integrated setting. (106, p. 100, See also 65, p. 20) In this review* I have consciously ignored the growing and important literature on the relation of ethnic integration and self concept, on the one hand, and of self concept and achievement, on the other. As Wilson and Pettigrew suggest, we must assume a very complicated, two-way process by which the three variables interact. (143, 102) Support by staff and acceptance by peers undoubtedly contribute to both.

In the Introduction I suggested that in rapidly changing times the nature of variables and their interrelationship may change. This review* has found clear evidence of a relation between economic integration and academic achievement, less conclusive evidence of a relation between ethnic integration and achievement. But the research we have examined refers to the immediate or distant past. The meaning of integration may be changing and the conditions under which it is implemented can be made different in the future.

One good reason that there has been no adequate research to date on the effect of integration is that there have been no adequate real-life tests—no large-scale, long-run instances of ethnic integration in top-quality majority-white schools and no large-scale long-run instances of top-quality schooling in segregated minority-group schools. Until our society tries such experiments, our researchers will not be able to evaluate them.

Bibliography on Minority Group Performance under Various Conditions of School Ethnic and Economic Integration

This bibliography was prepared in connection with the full position paper and the numbers beside each item follow the original text. Because of the special nature of this bibliography, some items have been included for which we are unable to provide complete source information.

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